

left vs. a-g notes

The very process of trying to define the avant garde is a polemical intervention into the diverse factions, cranky individualism, and already staked out claims of this and that critic, maker, and blow-hard.

At the heart of the call for a counter-cinema lies two key concepts. First, is the idea that to understand and adequately receive any particular example, you have to work to deal with the text. This stance of reception/reading/viewing/understanding the film calls for an active audience which must exert an extremely active and attentive concern for what is going on on the screen and in the soundtrack (if there is one). It is not a stance of contemplation or absorption in the work but a more critical, separate, and interactive intelligence that is called for.

Second, and following from the first point is the idea that such a different stance to the art object is not merely different, another possibility in the wide ranging world of the avant garde, but that such an attitude of work in relation to the text is better. Since this stance essentially rejects a pluralistic model of diverse artistic production and experience or diverse means of receiving and digesting any particular text or multi-leveled and perhaps changing engagement with the work, the counter-cinema argument essentially changes the basis for aesthetic and political =value in relation to the film.

The basic assumption of this counter-cinema argument is that the text itself can force a change on the viewer. I criticize this position with a little chagrin on my own part, for I once argued, in a piece on the Bruce Connor's Marilyn Times Five, that the radical text could force a change. But clearly any audience member has the opportunity to walk out, shut down attention, or actively resent and resist any particular film.